

## Relationship between Attitude towards Advertisement Appeals and Consumer Buying Behavior among Young Adults in Malaysia

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**DOI Link:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i11/3537>

**Published Date:** 18 November 2017

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of young adults' attitude towards advertisement appeals on consumer buying behaviour among young adults. Advertisement has been a very common communication tool used in marketing products to consumers. However, the attitude of young adults towards the use of these ad appeals (particularly fear, sex, and guilt) and its influence on their buying behaviour is yet to be investigated in Malaysia. The empirical study was conducted at Subang Parade, Selangor and a total of two hundred respondents were selected through multistage random sampling. The results showed that young adults have likeable attitude towards both fear and guilt appeals and it showed both significant relationship towards consumer buying behaviour; whereas dislikeable attitude is shown towards sex appeal and it show non-significant relationship towards consumer buying behaviour. Multiple regressions analysis is used to examine the influence of each appeal and the most influential appeal towards consumer buying behaviour. The results found out that the most influential attitude towards consumer buying behaviour is attitude towards fear appeal. Understanding the attitude of young adults towards advertisement appeals might support the recognition of its influences and provide information towards the improvement of the use of advertisement appeals in future.

**Keywords:** Advertisement, Fear Appeal, Sex Appeal, Guilt Appeal, Consumer Buying Behaviour

### Introduction

All institutes rely on advertisements because today's business world is more competitive than ever before (Arya, 2010). Advertisement is a dominant and leading tool in all marketing methods because it can bring positive impact on consumers buying behaviour (Malik, Ghafoor, Iqbal, Ali, Hunbal, Noman & Ahmed, 2013). Advertisement is said to play an important role in the business strategy for it can boost up business performance by attracting consumers to the products sold. It is designed to persuade people to buy certain product instead of others, and to promote the retention of continue to buy the product (Ranjbarian,

Fathi & Lari, 2011). Therefore, advertisers are aimed to reach as much targeted audiences as possible by using these different forms of advertisements, because the influence of the advertisement towards consumers is significant.

Nevertheless, the progressive rise of more surplus products is putting the market place in an aggressive state that related advertisements and information are appearing exceptionally repeated. Most companies make comparative practical claim, making them to face troubles in differentiating their goods and services (Hussainy, 2008). Therefore, different attractive advertising elements are used in the introduction of promotions to attract consumers' attention and to develop brand image. Among the elements used are appeals which consist of fear appeal, guilt appeal, humour appeal, and sex appeal (Gayatri, 2008). The purpose of appeal is to move the audience towards a goal set by advertiser. However, to make the advertisements more persuasive, advertiser often uses high impact and sensationally negative emotional appeals to generate the sense of fear, guilt and sorrow in order to create the awareness and needs to purchase. These appeals may affect consumers emotionally. Furthermore, sex appeal which brings unpleasant feelings to audience and exposes women as a sex tool shows its negative side too.

While the main purpose of advertisement is designed to change attitudes and to command our behaviour (Pollay, 1986), youth consumers who were fell in categories of impulsive (Ketzenberger & Forrest, 2000) and compulsive buying behaviours (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989) are easier to be affected in their purchases. Statistics by ASEAN UP indicate that approximately 34% of the Malaysian population is made up of teenagers and young adults (aged between 15-34 years) in year 2016, which signal the business value of this segment of the population. Their purchasing power comes from not only their own self but those of their parents too (Eze & Lee, 2012). Therefore, businesses target on young adults by directing various advertisements towards them wishing to bring an increase of profit to the businesses. In light of that, there is a need to look into how consumers think about the directed ads and its influence on buying behaviour especially from the perspective of young consumers.

Although ad appeals are commonly be used now, there is insufficient study looking into how Malaysia's consumers feel about the use of different ad appeals, needless to mention investigation to compare how favourable audiences feel about the usage of these appeals. By increasing these understanding, the effectiveness of advertising might improve greatly by embedding appropriate use of advertisement appeals. Additionally, according to past study, inadequate study showing the direct relation of consumer's attitude towards the advertisement appeals and consumer buying behaviour is found (Ansu-Mensah & Asuamah, 2013). These address the need for a further understanding of young adults' attitude towards different advertisement appeals and its relationship with their consumer buying behaviour.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between attitude towards advertisement appeals and consumer buying behaviour among young adults in Selangor, Malaysia. In specific, the objectives were:

1. To find out the attitude of young adults consumers regarding types of ad appeals (fear, sex, and guilt).
2. To ascertain the relationship between attitude towards advertisement appeals (fear, sex, and guilt) and consumer buying behaviour.
3. To determine the most influential attitude towards appeals on consumer buying behaviour.

**Review of Literature***Attitude and Consumer Buying Behaviour*

The focus of this paper is on the attitude of young adults towards the advertisement appeals and the relationship between these appeals and their buying behavior. Attitude towards a product is explained as a person's evaluation of an entity, a person or an issue. That is whether a person likes or dislikes something (Hogg & Vaughan 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). There are three components in attitude structure, which are affective component that refers to the feeling and emotion concerning a certain attitude object; behavioural component, referring to how individual acts and behaves affected by the attitude; and cognitive component refers to the belief and knowledge produced concerning the attitude object (McLeod, 2014). While consumer behaviour is the process of how consumer obtains goods and services for the purpose of fulfilling needs and wants (Khaniwale, 2015). This process involves the method they use in choosing any products and services, and the result of buyer's behavior is the buyer's decision towards a purchase.

The relationship of attitude and consumer buying behaviour has often been defined by the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This theory has been used in a lot of empirical researches to examine consumer's attitude towards issues such as advertisement in general, attitude towards television programme as well as attitude towards various products (Ansu-Mensah & Asuamah, 2013). According to the theory of planned behaviour, human action or behaviour is a function of attitude towards behaviour. It means that motivation to perform behaviour is a function of attitude and subjective norm. Attitudes towards advertisements have been defined as a "predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure situation" (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986). Therefore, the positive or negative attitude of respondents towards different advertisement appeals can influence their behaviour in making their purchases.

***Types of Appeal******Fear Appeal***

Fear appeal is defined as the usage of some threatening information and stimuli to evoke or trigger the feeling of threatening in audience (Myrick & Nabi, 2017). Fear appeal ads, as a strategy of persuasion has a long history of attention due to its influence towards attitude and behaviour of customers (Ajit & Raj, 2012). Fear appeal in advertisements usually provide two types of information which is first, the arousal of fear by presenting a threat; and second, a suggestion to advert the threat. According to the study of Ruiter, Kessel, Peter and Kok (2014), it is assumed that this emotional state involves physiological arousal as well as cognitive arousal; leading to the affective and behavioural responses which are directed towards the reduction or elimination of fear.

The most common used of fear appeals can be seen in health education design such as health promotion campaigns (Ruiter, Kessels, Peters & Kok, 2014). Often, fear appeals have been utilized in social campaigns with regards to convince audience for exercising healthier lifestyle, especially when the targeted audiences are young people (Chiang, Chan & Milan, 2016). Although advertisements with fear appeals are intended to show threat, it can be interesting as well to attract audiences' attention (Motwani, Agarwal & Shrimali, 2014). Nonetheless, based on the same study of Motwani et al. (2014), fear appeal used in advertisement has a significant relationship with consumer purchasing decision; which means it is possible that fear appeal used in advertisements can affect consumer buying behavior as purchasing decision is part of the process of buying behavior.

### Sex Appeal

According to Reichert, Heckler and Jackson (2001) as cited by Liu, Cheng and Li (2009), sex appeal is messages which are associated with sexual information used whether as brand information in advertising contexts or as persuasive appeals in marketing contexts. There are several uses of sex appeal in advertising, as stated in the study of Liu et al. (2009). First, it is used to attract attention of audience. Secondly, it helps the audience better in recalling the ad; and third, to evoke emotional responses such as arousal, excitement or lust. These few purposes can in return create desire for the product advertised.

Research has shown that sex appeal has the intensity of the 'grabbing value' because of the fact that sex is the second strongest of the psychological appeals after self-preservation (Chiang, Chan & Milan, 2016). Advertisements containing sex appeal can attract viewers' attention and the viewer will be more absorb to the advertisement as compared to advertisement without such appeal. Based on a research of Grazer and Kessling (2011), level of sexual intensity in advertisement can affect the intention of consumers' purchases. The intention to purchase is higher when a brand is advertised with appropriate level of sexual intensity. In other word, the use of sex appeal in advertisement can bring some extend of effect to the buying behavior of consumers. However, the effectiveness of the usage of sex appeal is not as effective towards all audience. According to Sawang (2010), Asian is less favorable to the use of sexual content in advertisements and even put sexual imagery ads into least favourable ads.

### Guilt Appeal

As noted by Chang (2011), guilt is a complex emotional reaction of an individual which can be seen as a combination of negative emotions, such as regret, remorse, and self-blame. When individuals are trying to change undesirable behaviours, they will plague by negative emotions (Hill & Moran, 2011). When a person is feeling guilty, he/she is preoccupied with some potential violation which will lead to the feeling of needs for guilt reduction, directing to behavioural responses of making retribution.

Research has investigated how guilt supports pro-social action (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014). With the ample utilization of guilt in achieving charity goals, attention has drawn to the effect of guilt appeals in marketing. Some studies proven that advertising campaigns that make people feel guilty (Wheatley & Oshikawa, 1970) result in consumer's purchase of the product or service. Anticipated guilt is also demonstrated to advance ethical consumer behavior in a retail context (Steenhaut & Van Kenhove 2005). Therefore, guilt appeals have become a powerful tool in advertising because they can influence consumer attention, attitudes to product, and purchase intentions (Chang, 2011).

### Methodology

Fundamentally, this study is a quantitative research aimed to examine the influence of attitude towards advertisement appeals to consumer buying behaviour. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative is used to test objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. The main objective of current study is to study the relationship of variables and the ability of independent variables to predict the dependent variables. Therefore, this study is quantitative in nature. This study was carried out among young adults in Selangor. The target population for young adults is defined following the category in the study of Petry (2002) where young adults ages between 18-35 years. Selangor is chosen as the study location because it is the state where highest number of shopping malls and retail markets are located. This is a strategic location as the residents here have more choices and easier access to

purchase goods and services. One district out of nine in Selangor was selected through simple random sampling (SRS) method, and then Subang Parade Mall is randomly selected as study location among the shopping malls in the district. A total of 200 respondents were selected through systematic sampling method which every fifth individual who was coming out of the main entrance of the shopping mall was selected as the respondent of this study. The number of male and female respondents was put under control using quota sampling to select 100 male respondents and 100 female respondents.

The instrument used for this study was a set of self-administrated questionnaire with the reasoning that questionnaire is suitable in providing an objective means of collecting information about people's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour (Sapsford, 1999). The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect the demographic background of the respondents. Following with the next section consisted of 11 items to measure attitude towards fear appeal, sex appeal and guilt appeal adapted from Motwani et al.(2014), Liu, Cheng and Li (2009), and Chithra and Kothai (2014). Finally, the last section measuring consumer buying behaviour among young adults was consisted of 8 items adapted from Dittmar et al. (2004), Siddiqui (2014), and Ahmed and Ashfaq (2013). All the items of attitude and buying behavior were measured using five point Likert scale ranging from "1"= "Strongly disagree" to "5" = "Strongly agree". Table 1 shows the reliability test results of all the sections in the questionnaire, reporting in the form of Cronbach's alpha coefficients. It shows that the Cronbach's alpha ranged within 0.66 to 0.83 and exceeded the minimum acceptable value (0.60) indicated by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006). Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22 was used to analyze data in this study. The descriptive analysis was utilized to uncover the information regarding to the demographic data of young adults and their attitude towards types of appeal in advertisement; whereas the multiple regression analysis was used to uncover the relationship between attitude towards each ad appeal and consumer buying behaviour, and the most influencing appeal affecting consumer buying behaviour.

Table 1:

*Result for Reliability Statistic*

Part	Alpha Coefficient	No. of item
Attitude towards : Fear Appeal	0.664	4
Sex Appeal	0.831	4
Guilt Appeal	0.731	3
Consumer Buying Behaviour	0.687	8

## Findings

### *Respondents Profile*

As the gender of respondents is put under control using quota sampling, the percentages of male and female respondents are the same (50%). In terms of the age of respondents, the number ranged from 20 to 34 years old. Near to three quarter of the respondents aged 20 to 24 years old (73.0%), followed by 25 to 29 years old (16.5%). For the ethnics of the respondents, slightly more than half (54.5%) of the respondents were Chinese and the least were Indians, 9.0%.

Furthermore, since a large amount of respondents in this study were still students aged between 20 and 24, more than half of the respondents (58.5%) have less than RM1000 income. Followed by the group who income in between RM2001 and RM3000 (17.0%) and

income more than RM3000 (14.5%). Among the respondents, largest portion of respondents (63.5%) has degree level as the highest education level and smallest portion of respondents (2%) hold SPM as highest education level. In short, more than half the respondents for this research are Chinese young adults aged between 20 to 24 years old who most of them were students with income below RM1000.

Table 2:  
*Respondents' Profile*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency(n=200)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	100	50.0
Female	100	50.0
<b>Age (years old)</b>		
20-24	146	73.0
25-29	33	16.5
30-34	21	10.5
<b>Ethnic</b>		
Malay	73	36.5
Chinese	109	54.5
India	18	9.0

Table 2 continue

<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Less than RM 1000	117	58.5
RM1000-RM2000	20	10.0
RM2001-RM3000	34	17.0
More than RM3000	29	14.5
<b>Education Level</b>		
SPM	4	2.0
STPM	41	20.5
Diploma	12	6.0
Degree	127	63.5
Master	10	5.0
PhD	6	3.0

### ***Attitude towards Advertisement Appeals***

Table 3 shows the result of descriptive analysis for attitude of young adults towards appeal. The result was divided into two categories which were likeable and dislikeable to determine the attitude of young adults consumers regarding types of ad appeals (fear, sex, and guilt). The higher the score recorded, the more likeable the attitude of respondent towards the element of appeal.

Table 3:

Attitude of respondents towards advertisement appeals

Types of appeal	Likeable		Dislikeable		Mean
	n	%	n	%	
Fear	183	91.5	17	8.5	13.21
Sex	114	57.0	86	43.0	10.43
Guilt	132	66.0	68	34.0	8.48

The results disclosed that majority of the respondents showed likeable attitude towards all of the advertisement appeal used in advertisement. For fear appeal, highest amount of respondents (91.5%) showed positive attitudes towards it with reported mean score of 13.21. From the result shown, it can be concluded that it is consistent with the result of previous research which stated although fear appeal can make an advertisement fearful and triggers the feeling of threatening in viewers, it can be interesting at the same time which respondents showed likeable attitude towards it (Motwani et al., 2014). Least amount of respondents (57.0%) showed likeable attitude towards sex appeals. Only slightly more than half of the respondents felt comfortable and pleasant seeing sex appeal in advertisement which this shows consistency with the result of Sawang (2010), that Asian tend to put sexual imagery ads into least favourable ads due to the preference of less sexually overt advertisement.

### **Consumer Buying Behaviour**

The data in Table 4 shows the mean score for statement 1 to 8 are all more than 3.0. The data disclosed that respondents will put quality as the first priority of product or services (mean score=4.28). Besides that, respondents will also consider price of the products and services (mean score=4.43), brand of the products and services (mean score=4.00) before making purchases. Although quality, price and brand have become the important attributes that respondents look for when buying, they will also buy new products in the market because of the advertisement about it (mean score=3.12) and try to purchase new product that had not tried before (mean score=3.20). In general, ad is the explanation behind respondents to buy new items in the market. Nonetheless, respondents will likewise take a gander at the price and quality of the items before purchasing it. They will prefer to purchase from brand quality. In the investigation of Parment (2013), it is revealed that, one of the principle parts that youngster look from a brand is quality. Other than that, they will pick a retailer in light of rational concern rather than passionate concern.

Table 4:

Mean Score of Consumer Buying Behaviour among Young Adults

Statement	Mean
I consider price of products and services before making purchases.	4.43
I give first priority to the quality of the product or service.	4.28
Quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that satisfies stated or implied needs.	4.26
I only buy products and services from brands which I know I will get the excellent services.	4.00
I want to buy products which make me feel more like the person I want to be.	3.74
Branded products provide more value than unbranded products.	3.54

I like to try on using products that I never had used before.	3.20
I buy new products in the market because of the advertisement about it	3.12

### ***Relationship between Attitude towards Advertisement Appeals and Consumer Buying Behaviour***

Referring to the second specific objective, the correlations between attitude towards each advertisement appeals and consumer buying behaviour is examined as shown in the table 5. Result found that attitude towards fear appeal and guilt appeal show positive and significant relationship with consumer buying behaviour. However, attitude towards fear appeal showed higher positive relationship ( $r=0.225$ ) as compare to guilt appeal ( $r=0.202$ ). This result shows consistency with previous studies which showed that fear appeal can result in positive level of intentions and behaviour change (Witte and Allen, 2000); and guilt can influence purchase intentions especially ethical consumption (Antonetti and Maklan, 2014).

Table 5:

Relationship between Attitude towards Advertisement Appeals and Consumer Buying Behaviour

Variable	Consumer Buying Behavior		
	Correlation (r)	Coefficient	Sig (2-tailed)
Attitude towards Fear Appeal	0.225**		0.001
Attitude towards Sex Appeal	-0.530		0.458
Attitude towards Guilt Appeal	0.202**		0.004

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Nevertheless, attitude towards sex appeal showed non-significant relationship with consumer buying behaviour. This is not consistent with study that shows significant negative relationship between attitude, sex appeal and buying intention (Lull & Bushman, 2015). Other past studies also found that although sexual appeal elicits different level of favourable responses, the relationship of sex appeal and buying intention existed (Grazer & Keesling, 2011).

### ***Regression Analysis of Attitude towards Advertisement Appeals and Consumer Buying Behaviour***

The third objective focused on determining the most influential attitude towards appeals on consumer buying behaviour Based on the result from multiple regression analysis in Table 6, when all appeals putting into a model and interact, effects are encountered. Attitude towards guilt appeal and sex appeals however, turned out to show non-significant relationship towards consumer buying behaviour ( $p=0.108$ ); and attitude towards fear appeal was found to be significant and most influencing as the beta value was the highest (0.178) compared to the other appeals. In consistent with this, attitude towards fear appeal is the most significant determinant with p-value of 0.03 ( $\alpha=0.05$ ). Based on this result, the attitude towards advertisement containing the stimuli of fear can produce highest influence on young adult consumers and potentially affecting their buying behaviour.

Table 6:

*Regression Analysis of Attitude towards Advertisement Appeals and Consumer Buying Behaviour*

Attitude towards	b	$\beta$	t	Sig.
Fear Appeal	0.322	0.178	2.187*	0.030
Sex Appeal	-0.145	-0.117	-1.648	0.101
Guilt Appeal	0.193	0.132	1.614	0.108

Notes:

R=0.207, R-square=0.073, Adjusted R-square=0.059, F=5.143, Sig. F=0.002

\*P<0.05

Nonetheless, the result also showed that the proportional contribution of the three advertisement appeals to consumer buying behaviour was low (0.073) with an adjusted R-Square ( $R^2$ ) of 0.059. This means that the three appeals are able to predict only 7.3 percent of the variances in consumer buying behaviour. Therefore, it means that there are other factors that contribute more in affecting the consumer buying behaviour of young adults.

### Conclusion

This study attempted to identify the influence of attitude towards advertisement appeals on consumer buying behaviour of young adults in Malaysia. Specifically, it sought to analyse the consumer buying behaviour of young adults and their attitude towards the elements (types of appeal) used in advertisement. In addition, this study endeavored to examine the relationship between the attitude of young adults towards appeal in advertisement and the consumer buying behavior, and the most influencing type of appeal towards consumer buying behaviour. From the findings, majority of the young adults showed likeable attitude towards the three types of examined advertisement appeals especially fear appeal. However, more young adults showed undesirable attitudes towards sex appeal as compared to fear and guilt. It is apparent that the likeable attitude towards fear and guilt appeals can affect buying behaviour of young adults, while sex appeal does not. This may due to the reasoning that young adults in Malaysia are less preferring advertisement with sex appeal; and since their behavioural intentions is determined by their attitude towards the ad (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977), sex appeal does not affect their purchases. The result also showed that only attitude towards fear appeal produces most influence towards consumer buying behaviour of young adults.

This study helps consumers and related authorities to have better understanding and recognition of the appeals used in advertisements, creating awareness about the influence of such advertising technique in affecting buying intentions and behaviour. In addition, these findings can provide insights not only for advertisers, but offer broader implications for marketers as well by showing how marketers should adjust their marketing strategies in order to take advantage of this effect. This information is useful for product or brand managers who wish to sell their goods to the Malaysian consumers and be adapted to aid in formulating a suitable marketing strategy.

Lastly, further research would be recommended to determine whether these implications hold true for other segments of respondents as the accessibility and affordability of consumers in reaching for different products being advertised may be different. Besides that, it is suggested to focus on the examination of types of appeals with specific category of products, for different appeal types are used in different product categories.

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